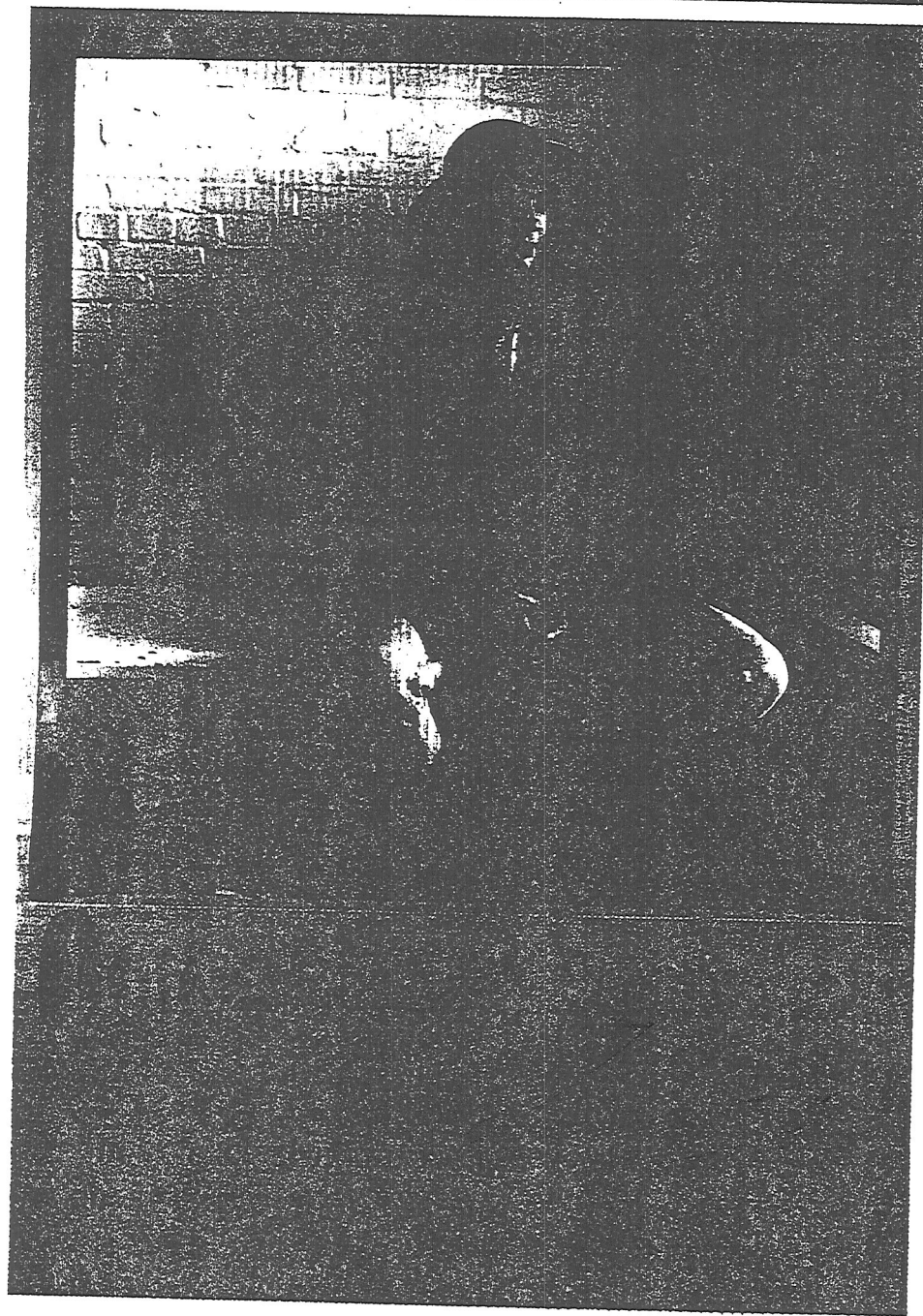


DALLAS

Observer

THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF DALLAS ■ FEBRUARY 27, 1992



Without a trace

*A body's silent
disappearance of
Bill Allen*
p. 12

Wiley ways

*John Wiley Price
uses county staff
for campaign,*
p. 11

Skip Bayless

*Why the Mars
didn't trade
Blackman,*
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Free tickets

*Special preview
showing of
Gladiator,*
p. 22

17 on

Cphoto = H. WEISBERG



NOTE = TO WEISBERG — DAVE LIPSTON claims "patch" on JFK's
right shoulder is fragment from head wound!

Cphoto = H. WEISBERG

I disagree — note
patch completely fills
in JFK's shoulder
— Hal Vuk

Laura Miller



Rachel has lived all her life with the uncertainty of her father's role in the JFK assassination: "I just want to know...I want all the facts out."

Oswald's legacy

The accused assassin's daughter harbors no illusions, offers no apologies for the dark shadow that looms over her life

SHE WAS FIVE YEARS OLD the first time she had to deal with it publicly. She was a little wiry kid, a tomboy, with a short, dark pixie haircut that her mom pinned up every morning with a big bow that never quite made it to school. "As soon as I got out the door, I'd pull the bow off," Rachel recalls mischievously, "and I wouldn't put it back on until I was coming home at the end of the day."

Rachel remembers being in school on that day when she was five—her arms spread wide, her hands gripping either side of a classroom doorway for leverage, her body hoisted in the air, her legs swinging back and forth, back and forth.

Another five-year-old brushed by. "I know what your daddy did," the child said, taunting, as children do.

"Well, yeah, he did do that," Rachel responded matter-of-factly, almost breezily, as though her daddy had just been accused of picking up the wrong fork at a formal dinner party.

But then, how could her reaction have been anything else?

How does one so young grasp the enormity, the horror, the grotesque implications of having a daddy accused of shooting and killing the president of the United States?

"Looking back on it now, I think if a grown-up had been around to hear that,

they would have just died," says Rachel, now 28 years old. "But as a little kid, it was nothing. And I'm sure for the little kid who asked it it was nothing."

It wouldn't stay nothing for long.

As the daughter of Lee Harvey Oswald grew older, her understanding of what her father was accused of doing became painfully clear. And impossible to ignore.

For example: How do you ignore the inevitable question on the American history tests: "Who was in the sniper's perch in Dallas on November 22, 1963?" Each time that question appeared, and it always did, Rachel would stare down at her paper and read the words over and over again—all the

while sneaking looks at the kids around her to see if they knew that this question was about her.

"Even to this day, I feel this oppressive stare whenever anything comes on the news about it and I'm in a public place," Rachel says. "I think I have this mechanism where I will automatically look around at people, and they may not even be paying attention to me. It's just something I always look for."

School lectures, though, were worse than tests—particularly because textbooks and teachers have always clung tenaciously to the pat, safe, uncontroversial, seemingly incontrovertible 1963 version of events.

"The classes were all the same, with the same buzz words," she says. "The teachers all talked of Lee Harvey Oswald...the ominous figure...with the shady background...who crouched in the perch...who gunned down the president...who fled out the back, making his escape."

"I would just kind of sit and hear what they said, knowing I knew much more than what they knew," she continues. "Maybe if not from a historian's point of view, but from a different personal perspective."

Those feelings only intensified when she got out of high school. "The problems really came in college," she says, "because in college you get locked on a subject for days, or weeks sometimes, and it was hard to have them dissect this piece by piece and not say anything. I didn't want people to know who I was. But I always wanted to say, 'This is not as black-and-white as you make it seem.'"

She never did.

"As a rule of thumb, it's not worth making a stand in a class or in a group of people, because of the repercussions of it," she says. "There's too much embarrassment and shame. You just open a whole can of worms when you say, 'I'm Lee Harvey Oswald's daughter.'"

Until now, anyway. Until a certain Hollywood movie came out and changed the way we think about the Kennedy assassination. And convinced Rachel Oswald that maybe there were some people in this world who have the same nagging questions she does about what happened that day in Dallas.

Oliver Stone stood up at the Dallas premiere of his movie *JFK* two months ago and said he hoped that his film would result in the release of previously sealed files on the assassination.

He didn't say that he hoped to ease the burden of a young woman sitting in the audience before him, who once upon a time swung in schoolhouse doorways and deflected tasteless comments about a man she doesn't remember but will never forget.

Stone probably had no idea he could have that kind of impact.

Neither did Rachel Oswald.

RACHEL WAS 33 DAYS OLD when her father was accused of shooting the president. She was 35 days old when her father was murdered.

Today she sits on the couch in her small living room in a Texas college town, a living testimony to her father's dark looks and

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Laura Miller

◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

who tried to make something of his life, and he was doing things under orders that he didn't realize were a part of the bigger picture."

Whatever it was he was involved in, it certainly made him unpleasant to live around—when he was around. Rachel's mother tells her stories about how he never had any money and never brought home any food for his children or provided any prenatal care for his wife. He beat Marina. He wouldn't allow her to learn English. Says Rachel, "I know he wasn't an angel."

If history had played out a different way, and Lee Harvey Oswald had never been implicated in the assassination and had lived to raise his daughters, Rachel believes her life would have been worse.

"Based on what I know about him, we probably would have been poor," she says. "I don't know if I would have been educated. My mom's life would have been totally different because he abused her."

In contrast, the Oswald women, all three of them, have never been poor or abused or deprived of an education. To the contrary, life since 1963 has been surprisingly good. Considering, "I think just as a result of this whole thing we women are all strong," Rachel says. "And I don't know if I would have been like that if this had not happened."

FOR A LONG TIME, Rachel believed what had been drummed into her in school—that her father was the assassin.

Period.

"Through my high school years, I believed he did it alone," she says. "And I was just trying to be a normal high school girl and didn't want to deal with that."

"Then in my college years at UT, I thought he did it but he was involved in a conspiracy," she adds. "That's the impression I got from the news and the media. My mother, all during that time, was saying that she thought Lee was innocent of the murder. I remember being doubtful about that."

"It's only in the last two years that I've come to start agreeing with her—I think there's a lot of evidence that he was one of a lot of people there, but that he may not have been responsible for the murder."

Rachel has never read a conspiracy book or looked at any documents or records about the assassination or followed the various theories that pop up on tabloid TV. "I don't like to read any of this stuff because you read one thing and it gets you all excited because this author has all this evidence, and your father comes out smelling like a rose," says Rachel. "And then you read this other book, by someone with just as many credentials, and it says just the opposite, and it puts you on an emotional roller coaster."

But two years ago, two men from the JFK Assassination Center in Dallas contacted Rachel and her mother and sister with a new piece of information: they were parading before the press.

The now infamous Roscoe White story had come to them from a small-time private detective, who swore that his client—the son of a former, now-deceased Dallas policeman named Roscoe White—could prove that his father was involved in the assassination. Though the media poo-pooed the story and the Assassination Center no longer talks about it much, the "reve-

lation" did serve one useful purpose: it introduced Rachel Oswald to the conspiracy world—specifically, great volumes of material housed at the Assassination Center.

"I never knew this stuff existed," Rachel says. "Then it really infuriated me and prompted me to be more involved, because I just couldn't believe the stuff existed."

Two things most impressed her: paraffin tests performed on her father's hands after he was arrested found traces of nitrate on his hands, which would perhaps indicate that he handled a handgun (though the conspiracy buffs point out that it could also mean he was handling paint that day or even urinating). But the results were negative on a paraffin test of his right cheek, raising doubts about whether he ever fired a rifle.

Furthermore, she says, there were no fingerprints or thumbprints found on Oswald's rifle immediately after the shooting. After examining the weapon, the Dallas police had given it to the FBI, who sent it to Washington, where no fingerprints were found. But after the rifle was returned to Dallas, the Dallas police, lo and behold, found a partial palm print of Oswald's underneath the gun barrel. Oswald was in the morgue at the time, and some speculate that the print was taken from his body.

None of this is concrete evidence, in Rachel's mind, that her father was innocent of any crime in Dallas that day. But it does raise disturbing questions that she would like answered.

To that end, she had done two interviews in her life before this one. She did the first in November 1990 with David Lifton, who wrote the highly acclaimed conspiracy book *Best Evidence*. Lifton had earned the Oswald family's trust with his painstaking research, and when he approached Rachel about helping him with an upcoming book on the life of her father, she agreed. She sat in front of a video camera for 45 minutes and answered nine questions. Lifton told her the videotape would only be used in tandem with his book.

That wasn't quite true.

This past November, to Rachel's extreme horror, she looked up at the television in the restaurant where she works and saw her face on the screen. Lifton had sold the videotape to the tabloid TV show "Hard Copy." Then, in January, she learned that he had sold her out again to a tabloid newspaper in Holland—this time, it was a number of photographs he had taken of her with the understanding that they would only be kept by him as a personal memento of their work together.

Lifton's tactics only further eroded any respect or trust Rachel had toward the press, which has been preying on her family all her life. "They always come in November, and by December 1, it's over," Rachel says, "and my mom's left feeling that she's been holed out again...They go on with their lives, and we're left behind to deal with it."

To make matters worse, what little does appear about the family in print or on TV is apt to be wrong, twisted, sensationalized, or slanted. That, Rachel says, is the way it is with reporters, who will do or say anything to finagle their way into her mother's confidence. They drop friends' names; they promise flattering, sympathetic stories; they allude to new, convincing evidence that will help clear the Oswald name.